

Egil's Saga

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1893 translation into English by W. C. Green from the original Icelandic 'Egils saga

Skallagrímssonar'.

Chapter 1 - Of Kveldulf and his sons.

There was a man named Ulf, son of Bjalf, and Hallbera, daughter of Ulf the fearless; she was sister of Hallbjorn Half-giant in Hrafnista, and he the father of Kettle Hæing. Ulf was a man so tall and strong that none could match him, and in his youth he roved the seas as a freebooter. In fellowship with him was one Kari of Berdla, a man of renown for strength and daring; he was a Berserk. Ulf and he had one common purse, and were the dearest friends.

But when they gave up freebooting, Kari went to his estate at Berdla, being a man of great wealth. Three children had Kari, one son named Eyvind Lambi, another Aulvir Hnuf, and a daughter Salbjorg, who was a most beautiful woman of a noble spirit. Her did Ulf take to wife, and then he too went to his estates. Wealthy he was both in lands and chattels; he took baron's rank as his forefathers had done, and became a great man. It was told of Ulf that he was a great householder; it was his wont to rise up early, and then go round among his labourers or where his smiths were, and to overlook his stalk and fields, and at times he would talk with such as needed his counsel, and good counsel he could give in all things, for he was very wise. But everyday as evening drew on he became sullen, so that few could come to speak with him. He was an evening sleeper, and it was commonly said that he was very shape strong. He was called Kveldulf.

Kveldulf and his wife had two sons, the elder was named Thorolf, the younger Grim; these, when they grew up, were both tall men and strong, as was their father. But Thorolf was most comely as well as doughty, favoring his mother's kin; very cheery was he, liberal, impetuous in everything, a good trader, winning the hearts of all men. Grim was swarthy, ill-favoured, like his father both in face and mind; he became a good man of business; skilful was he in wood and iron, an excellent smith. In the winter he often went to the herring fishing, and with him many house-carles.

But when Thorolf was twenty years old, then he made him ready to go a harrying. Kveldulf gave him a

long-ship, and Kari of Berdla's sons, Eyvind and Aulvir, resolved to go on that voyage, taking a large force and another long-ship; and they roved the seas in the summer, and got them wealth, and had a large booty to divide. For several summers they were out roving, but stayed at home in winter with their fathers. Thorolf brought home many costly things, and took them to his father and mother; thus they were well-to-do both for possessions and honour. Kveldulf was now well stricken in years, and his sons were grown men.

Chapter 2 - Of Aulvir Hnuf.

Audbjorn was then king over the Firthfolk; there was an earl of his named Hroald, whose son was Thorir. Atli the Slim was then an earl, he dwelt at Gaula; he had sons - Hallstein, Holmstein, and Herstein; and a daughter, Solveig the Fair. It happened one autumn that much people were gathered at

Gaula for a sacrificial feast, then saw Aulvir Hnuf Solveig and courted her; he afterwards asked her to wife. But the earl thought him an unequal match and would not give her. Whereupon Aulvir composed many love-songs, and thought so much of Solveig that he left freebooting, but Thorolf and Eyvind Lambi kept it on.

Chapter 3 - The beginning of the rule of Harold Fairhair.

Harold, son of Halfdan Swarthy, was heir after his father. He had bound himself by this vow, not to let his hair be cut or combed till he were sole king over Norway, wherefore he was called Harold Shockhead. So first he warred with the kings nearest to him and conquered them, as is told at length elsewhere. Then he got possession of Upland; thence he went northwards to Throndheim, and had many battles there before he became absolute over all the Thronds. After that he purposed to go north

to Naumdale to attack the brothers Herlaug and Hrollaug, kings of Naumdale. But when these brothers

heard of his coming, Herlaug with twelve men entered the sepulchral mound which they had caused to be made (they were three winters at the making), and the mound then was closed after them. But king

Hrollaug sank from royalty to earldom, giving up his kingdom and becoming a vassal of Harold. So Harold gained the Naumdalesmen and Halogaland, and he set rulers over his realm there. Then went he southwards with a fleet to Mæra and Raumsdale. But Solvi Bandy-legs, Hunthiof's son, escaped thence, and going to king Arnvid, in South Mæra, he asked help, with these words:

'Though this danger now touches us, before long the same will come to you; for Harold, as I ween, will hasten hither when he has enthralled and oppressed after his will all in North Mæra and Raumsdale. Then will the same need be upon you as was upon us, to guard your wealth and liberty, and to try everyone from whom you may hope for aid. And I now offer myself with my forces against this tyranny and wrong. But, if you make the other choice, you must do as the Naumdalesmen have done, and go of your own will into slavery, and become Harold's thralls. My father though it victory to die a king with honour rather than become in his old age another king's subject. Thou, as I judge, wilt think the same, and so will others who have any high spirit and claim to be men of valour.'

By such persuasion king Arnvid was determined to gather his forces and defend his land. He and Solvi made a league, and sent messengers to Audbjorn, king of the Firthfolk, that he should come and help them. Audbjorn, after counsel taken with friends, consented, and bade cut the war-arrow and send the

war-summons throughout his realm, with word to his nobles that they should join him.

But when the king's messengers came to Kveldulf and told him their errand, and that the king would have Kveldulf come to him with all his house-carles, then answered he:

'It is my duty to the king to take the field with him if he have to defend his own land, and there be harrying against the Firthfolk; but this I deem clean beyond my duty, to go north to Mæra and defend their land. Briefly ye may say when ye meet your king that Kveldulf will sit at home during this rush to war, nor will he gather forces nor leave his home to fight with Harold Shockhead. For I think that he

has a whole load of good-fortune where our king has not a handful.'

The messengers went back to the king, and told him how their errand had sped; but Kveldulf sat at home on his estates.